

CHAPTER 8 URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

Urban design has been a key public policy concern in Roswell for more than three decades. The architectural design of development within the Historic District has been reviewed and approved by the Historic Preservation Commission (see Chapter 6 of this Comprehensive Plan), formerly established as a Civic Design Commission before the Historic Preservation Act of 1980. In addition, for more than two decades, a Design Review Board has reviewed the architecture, site design, and landscaping. Long before the adoption of design guidelines was the “trendy” thing for proactive municipalities to do, Roswell prepared, adopted, and implemented design guidelines for selected areas of the City. Together, these programs of architectural and site design review have helped Roswell to preserve its past, ensure quality development, and guide its future in a way that maintains and enhances its character.

An Urban Design Element is not required by state rules for local planning, but given its past emphasis on urban design, Roswell prepared and adopted an Urban Design Element in 2000, as a part of its 2020 Comprehensive Plan. In 2000, the need to recognize all adopted design guidelines was the primary concern of the Urban Design Element. Another concern at that time related to the character and design of the City as a whole. Having divided the City into different design districts, there was some concern that the City and its Design Review Board might be losing sight of its character as a whole. Hence the Urban Design Element in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan established citywide urban design policies.

Urban design and the City’s architectural and site design review processes affect the outcome of the City’s development pattern. In many respects, design review offers a “front line” opportunity to implement the City’s visions and Comprehensive Plan policies for encouraging redevelopment, preserving historic resources, conserving natural resources, enhancing the natural environment, and imposing order and compatibility in land use. Urban design also plays an important part in the economic well-being of a community. Urban design extends in important ways into all elements of planning, including historic preservation, land use, transportation, housing, economic development and redevelopment, utilities and community facilities, and the environment.

The Urban Design Element is a concerted effort to recognize the positive attributes of the City, to enhance and conserve those attributes, and to improve the built environment where it is less than satisfactory. Urban design involves visualizing alternative forms and then choosing actions that will achieve the best possible results for the City.

As the City of Roswell evolves, new and varied planning issues are created. Given the fact that people are more mobile in today’s society, there are increased opportunities to choose where to live, work, shop, and spend leisure time. The physical appearance of a community and its amenities weigh heavily on this decision. Addressing urban design issues has remained and continues to be critical to Roswell, as mixed land use policies and redevelopment efforts take shape. Good urban design can help generate a sense of place for the City and make it more of a destination, rather than a place to pass through. Issues such as architectural scale, density, and aesthetic character will continue to be considered to ensure that new development supports and enhances the overall character of the City and its special places and neighborhoods.

Urban design principles and recommendations should apply to both the public environment, as expressed through elements such as city buildings, streetscapes, parks, and plazas, and the

City's policies and regulations for private development. Research and experience has shown that there is a positive return on investment for quality design features, for both government and property owners. For example, the money a city spends on landscaped roadway medians, sidewalks, and street trees is likely to be amply returned in the form of increased tax revenue resulting from the overall increase in property values that accompanies attractive and desirable urban areas.

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CITY PATTERN

The pattern of a city is a combination of its natural and built environments. The pattern of Roswell contributes greatly to its overall appearance. Arguably, it is the appearance of a community that draws people in to live, work and shop. In some ways the pattern is seen in two dimensions as though it were a map; in other ways it has a three-dimensional form. The City's two-dimensional pattern need not be viewed as a rigid order but, rather, as a sense of balance and compatibility among its residents and businesses. The pattern is made up of the following:

WATER, specifically the Chattahoochee River, defines the southern boundary for the City and a part of its recreation and way of life. The river serves as open space, a focus of scenic views, a fragile ecosystem, and even a place of human activity (mostly recreational). The City's other tributaries, creeks, and streams also form the City's riparian system that contributes to its natural landscape.

RIDGES, which allow the City to be seen and help define neighborhoods and districts.

OPEN SPACES AND LANDSCAPED AREAS, whose green patterns enrich the color of the City and help to identify districts and provide places for recreation.

STREETS AND ROADWAYS, which connect the built environment and in doing so unify the pattern. When they follow a ridgeline or meander through a valley, streets and roadways can provide vistas of open spaces. The character of their design also influences the character of land use development. Streets and roadways are of many types, each with their own functions and characteristics, and together they make up a system that accommodates the movements of persons and commerce that make up the daily hustle of the City.

BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES, which reflect the character of districts and centers for activity, provide reference points for human orientation, and may add to (but can detract from) topography and views. Some buildings and structures, such as City Hall and churches, stand out as single features of community importance.

People perceive this pattern from many places and during many activities; from their homes and neighborhoods, from parks, from places of work, from the streets while traveling, and from entranceways and observation points while visiting the City.

ELEMENTS COMPRISING THE PATTERN

Peter Calthorpe (2003)¹ contends that only four elements are needed to design complete regions, cities, and towns. They are: *centers, corridors, preserves, and districts*.

¹ Calthorpe, Peter. 2003. "The Regional City." In Donald Watson, Alan Plattus, and Robert Shibley, eds., *Time Saver Standards for Urban Design* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003).

Classifying all areas in terms of these four elements can be difficult. Sometimes, a given area fits into more than one category. For instance, the local historic district was designated in a prior amendment to the Comprehensive Plan as a “center,” since it functions as a center for commerce, government, civic activities, and social functions, yet by definition it is a “district.” Similarly, Parkway Village, has been referred to as a “district” but may be more worthy of the term “corridor.” Another example, Garrison Hill could be viewed in terms of a corridor (Marietta Highway, a.k.a., SR 120), a district, and a neighborhood.

Another issue with trying to impose a classification scheme for design and character areas is that a given element can itself be further subdivided into character types. Centers and corridors may have further distinguishable features. For instance, Parkway Village has discernable neighborhood “centers” or “villages” within it at Hardscrabble Road and Crabapple Road.

After considering what fits best with Roswell’s pattern, the following five elements are proposed to conceptualize the City’s pattern: centers, corridors, districts, preserves, and neighborhoods. This typology adopts Calthorpe’s framework as a visioning strategy but also adds an element absent in his classification scheme – *neighborhoods*. In proposing this typology of character elements, it is recognized that geographically it can become messy or that there are equally valid alternatives for conceptualizing the elements of pattern in the City. The first two elements – centers and corridors – are consistent with evolving policy of the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Regional Development Plan. Including neighborhoods in the typology is consistent with Roswell’s character as a collection of fine neighborhoods which require their own attention (see Chapter 7, Framework for Neighborhood Planning).

Centers

Centers are local and regional destinations at the neighborhood, village, town, or urban scale. Centers are made up of multiple uses (retail spaces, housing, services, and civic buildings), but they are dominated primarily by retail.

Influenced by the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Regional Development Plan, Livable Centers Initiative, and regional reviews of local plans, Roswell re-conceptualized its land use plan in part to recognize activity centers which differ in their size, scale, and function. In addition, there are evolving efforts such as the Holcomb Bridge Road Revitalization Study which can also be viewed in terms of corridor, district, and neighborhood elements. There are at least five recognizable centers in Roswell:

- Roswell Historic District (Activity Center)
- Georgia 400 @ East Holcomb Bridge Road (Activity Center)
- SR 9/ Holcomb Bridge Road/Alpharetta Hwy/Crossville Road (Town Center)
- Crabapple Road at Houze Road (Activity Center)

Corridors

Corridors are connecting elements based on either natural systems or infrastructure and transportation lines. They represent a flow – of water, traffic, or habitat movement. General examples include main street, riverfront, strip commercial corridors, abandoned railroad tracks, and utility corridors. Within Roswell, there are at least five corridors that are particularly recognizable (others are possible).

- Chattahoochee River Corridor
- Parkway Village (SR 92 or Crossville Road) Corridor
- Midtown Roswell (SR 9 or Alpharetta Street) Redevelopment Corridor
- Garrison Hill (SR 120 or Marietta Highway) Corridor
- Holcomb Bridge Road (SR 140) Corridor

Districts

As conceptualized by Calthorpe, districts are special use areas which are necessarily dominated by a single primary activity. Examples provided by Calthorpe (2000) include university campuses, airports, industrial districts, and military bases. By definition, they are functionally separate from centers and neighborhoods.

Roswell has a number of areas formerly designated as districts but which have been reclassified here as centers and corridors. However, there is at least one primary activity area that is apparent in Roswell:

- Employment District (NE Roswell north of Hembree Road)

Preserves

Preserves are open space elements that frame the city and preserve critical habitat. Examples given by Calthorpe include productive agriculture and wildlife management areas. In Roswell, three preserves are evident:

- Big Creek Unit of National Recreation Area
- Big Creek Passive Park Preserve
- Leita Thompson Memorial Park
- Chattahoochee Nature Center

Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods are primarily residential subdivisions but within which some civic and recreational uses may also exist. Roswell is mostly a city of neighborhoods, and considerable effort could go into defining neighborhood boundaries. As noted in the preceding chapter of this plan, however, delineation of neighborhood boundaries is better left to the residents than superimposed by planners. However, it is worth reiterating here four particular types of neighborhoods based in part on Chapter 7 of this Comprehensive Plan:

- Intown settlements
- Master Planned Communities (e.g., Martin's Landing, Brookfield West, Willow Springs, Horseshoe Bend, and Saddle Creek)
- Conventional subdivisions (throughout Roswell)
- Rural development

Using these five elements, a character area or overall development concept map is prepared that includes all of the City's land area. This overall development concept map may become useful in a variety of planning contexts.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Roswell has two boards/commissions that review and approve architecture and site designs for private development projects. The Historic Preservation Commission reviews and decides on development proposals within the City's Historic District. The Design Review Board reviews non-single-family development proposals in all other parts of the City outside the Historic District. The intent of the City in adopting and implementing design guidelines is well captured in the statement below:

Design guidelines are a set of criteria, uniformly applied in the planning approval process, to evaluate the appropriateness of proposed changes to individual properties in a designated district. The ultimate goal of design guidelines is to direct physical and visual changes in the district to create an architecturally and physically cohesive area of specified character. Design guidelines are meant to create a strong identity for the area as a distinctive place to shop, visit, work, and live. Design guidelines are a means of bringing together the interests of individual property owners and the general public to achieve mutual benefits.

As alluded to above, Roswell has had a long history of establishing design districts. The 2020 Plan established six different design districts, starting first and foremost with its local historic district (see Chapter 8 of this Comprehensive Plan) and including Parkway Village, Midtown, Commerce, Riverbanks Campus, and Garrison Hill. At one time, the City's economic development strategy centered around an earlier conception of districts which included a medical district (around North Fulton Regional Hospital) and a "neon zone" that was abandoned as a concept and replaced by the Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Corridor Overlay District. Another set of design guidelines, for the "Commerce District" (SR 9/Holcomb Bridge Road/Crossville Road) has also been abandoned² and has been mostly subsumed as part of Midtown Roswell or otherwise designated as a center. Yet another district, the "Riverbanks Campus" District, resulted in basic guidelines that were eventually adopted as citywide policies. The Riverbanks Campus District is also generally included as the Holcomb Bridge Road Corridor and the regional activity center at Georgia 400 and Holcomb Bridge Road.³

² In 1995, the Brookwood Design Group prepared design guidelines for the Commerce District, which includes development surrounding the intersection of State Route 9 and Crossville Road/Holcomb Bridge Road. The Commerce District lies east of the Parkway Village District and extends east along Holcomb Bridge Road to the intersection of Warsaw Road. A distinctive feature of the Commerce District Design Guidelines was the recommendation that gatehouses and towers be installed on private property, and that ivy-covered trellises be installed at the major intersection in the district and over pedestrian walkways. Trellis facades are also supposed to be part of the architectural facades of buildings. Due primarily to the significant cost associated with the installation of gatehouses, towers, and trellises, the overall signature element for the Commerce District as envisioned in the guidelines has not been implemented. For all practical purposes, the concept of installing trellises was abandoned by 2000 given cost constraints and little private support to implement them as an overall design theme for the district.

³ In 1999, Roswell's Community Development Department hired Sizemore Floyd Architects to produce a set of design guidelines for the mostly commercial area east of the Commerce District, centered on Georgia Highway 400. The City Council adopted the design guidelines by resolution on November 1, 1999. The "signature element" of the Riverbanks Campus District was the construction of two parallel brick walls placed in or near the right-of-way, with a meandering sidewalk running in between the walls. Gateway arches were also envisioned over entrances to developments to link wall segments. The total cost of implementing the signature element was estimated at \$676 per linear foot. On June 5, 2000, the Mayor and City Council passed a resolution that extended the Riverbanks Campus

Historic District Design Guidelines

To guide the Historic Preservation Commission in making decisions about certificates of appropriateness and other requested actions, a set of design guidelines was prepared and adopted by the Roswell City Council on December 1, 1997. The Historic District Guidelines provide a summary of Roswell's history and various architectural styles in the district and detailed guidelines for residential and commercial uses. An appendix contains the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation*. The design guidelines for the Historic District are expected to be amended from time to time, especially in order to implement the recommendations of the Historic Preservation Element (Chapter 6). Specifically, the local historic district has three character areas of its own: Town Square and Mimosa Boulevard, Mill Village, and Canton Street.

Parkway Village District Design Guidelines

In 1992, a blue ribbon committee with voluntary assistance from two architectural firms (Sheffer and Grant; and Carruth and Carruth) prepared a set of design guidelines that applies to properties along Crossville Road (SR 92). Preparation of the guidelines was based on precepts that development within this corridor exhibits a vernacular architectural tradition and that the corridor remain unique in character. Among the several guidelines of the village district are a "build to" line, location of parking areas behind buildings, and a signature element (or defining feature for the district) of wood-rail fencing with stone piers at major intersections. The City amended its Zoning Ordinance to establish Parkway Village as an overlay zone and provides for a second option to the underlying zoning for development (one that allows for the conversion of single-family dwellings to office uses and also allows for commercial development and townhouses if tracts are large enough for such uses).

Garrison Hill District Design Guidelines

In 1999, after extensive citizen participation in the proposed design of Maxwell Properties, Inc.'s Kroger shopping center development at the intersection of Marietta Highway (SR 120) and Coleman Road, the City Council authorized development of a set of design guidelines for this highway corridor. This design area includes the southwest portion of Roswell and abuts the City's Historic District. The City hired Talka and Connor Architects and Hughes, Good, O'Leary, and Ryan to prepare guidelines for the corridor. The guidelines were adopted by City Council in March 2000. The guidelines address the Marietta Highway streetscape, architectural features, and site arrangements. Specific guidelines are provided for commercial, office, and residential/institutional developments.

Unique to the Garrison Hill District was a "double boundary" approach, which specifies two areas. The first area is the highway corridor itself, within which design guidelines apply. The second area is the surrounding residential subdivisions, within which certain recommendations are made with regard to streetscapes, fences, intersection designs, and traffic signs. Generally, the streetscape features and architectural design characteristics suggested in the Garrison Hill District Design Guidelines are intended to extend the historic character (e.g., period lighting) existing east of the district along the highway into the district.

District Design Guidelines (including the signature element) to the area known as the "eastside annexation." The current study of the Holcomb Bridge Road Corridor east of GA 400, includes the Riverbanks Campus District.

Midtown Roswell Design Guidelines

Midtown Roswell extends along Alpharetta Street from Woodstock Street to Holcomb Bridge Road and beyond, forming primarily a commercial corridor but also including residences and civic buildings. A number of key issues that face this corridor, especially its outmoded commercial strip centers have been addressed in the Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan (see Chapter 4, Redevelopment Element, of this Comprehensive Plan). To provide additional guidance to the Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan, design guidelines were prepared and adopted.

The Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan was based on a citizen defined vision for the community. City leaders created a plan to influence neighborhood stability, outline commercial redevelopment strategies, define street beautification plans, and improve the traffic and pedestrian safety in the corridor. The plan identified transportation investments, land use controls, streetscape improvements and other investments in public spaces that support the vision of a more livable Midtown Roswell, where pedestrians, cyclists, transit users and motorists peacefully coexist within a vibrant commercial environment surrounded by healthy residential neighborhoods.

The Redevelopment Plan recognized that even within the Midtown Roswell District a variety of unique development conditions exist that will dictate different redevelopment approaches. The Redevelopment Plan outlines a "three lens strategy" (revitalize, reposition and reorganize) that identifies three unique conditions within Midtown Roswell with a specific approach for each area. For more information on the three lens strategy, see the Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan.

Generally, the conceptual streetscape program envisions the installation of historic streetscape amenities (period lighting, park benches, trash receptacles, and stacked stone walls within the Historic District and similar streetscape amenities, but with slightly different characteristics) in the corridor north of the Historic District. The City is currently working toward getting the detailed plans in place to begin installing landscaping and streetscape improvements (including bus shelters) along SR 9. Funds have been specifically earmarked for landscaping and streetscape improvements along Atlanta and Alpharetta streets.

Citywide Design Guidelines

On June 5, 2000, the Mayor and City Council passed a resolution that extended the ten general criteria of the Riverbanks Campus District Design Guidelines (excluding the signature element, landscaping palette and color/material schemes) to all areas of the City, including the Historic District, unless the criteria conflict with adopted design guidelines that are more specific to a particular district. The ten guidelines are listed below.

1. Shield Parked Vehicles from View (use a tall hedge or at least partial screening via an earthen berm).
2. Shield Parking Surfaces from View (vary the elevation of the parking surface in relation to the street).
3. Safe Sidewalks (install a 4 to 6 foot planter strip between sidewalk and street).

4. Treatment of Large Flat Wall Areas (use evergreen or at least some deciduous trees to screen them).
5. Signage (monument style, ground signs only are preferred).
6. Softscapes (Vegetation) (install hedge, trees, and grass, or at least trees and grass, along street rights-of-ways).
7. Visual Patterns on Building Facades (vary visible façade wall planes to create shadows and visual interest).
8. Site Lighting (use down shades on curved arms, mounted on ornate metal poles no more than 30 feet high, for parking areas).
9. Contextual Appearance (vary building rooflines and provide connections between neighboring buildings).
10. Visible Utility Lines (bury or at least conceal utilities).

CITYWIDE DESIGN ISSUES

Gateway Features and Area Markers

As part of the Garrison Hill District Design Guidelines and the SR 9 Streetscape Improvement Program, Roswell has set forth recommendations for installing monuments that mark entrances to the City and to various character areas. Upon review of the Garrison Hill district marker proposal, the Design Review Board advocated one unified design for all district markers throughout the City (see Figure 8.1). A Collaborate effort between the Historic Preservation Commission and the Design Review Board during the year 2000 resulted in agreement on the design of a district marker that would be architecturally appropriate in the Historic District and in all other districts of the City. No funds have been appropriated for the gateway features and district markers.

Design Review Process

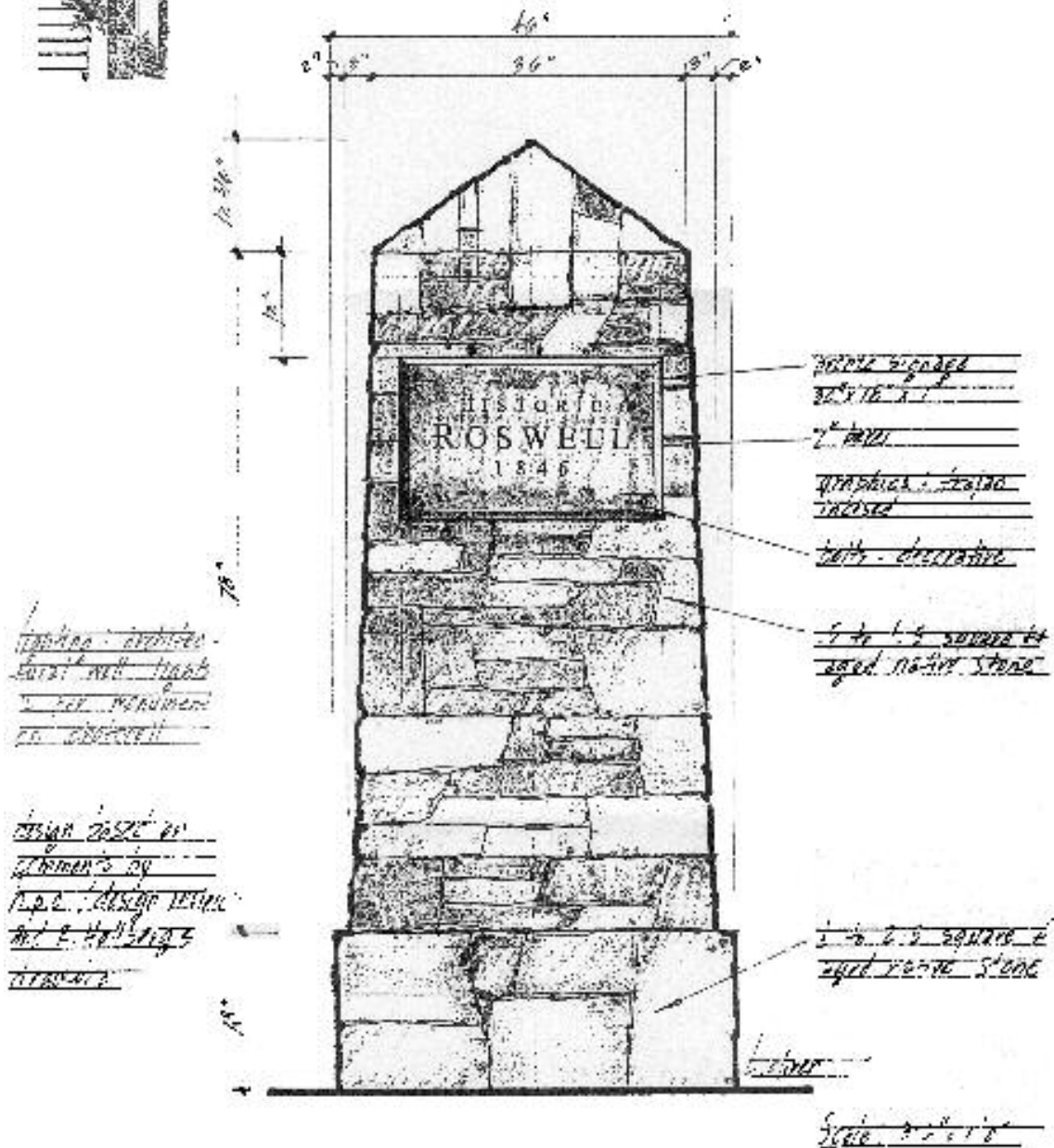
Design review is a part of the development process that pays special attention to areas within the City that possesses historical, architectural or cultural merit. Roswell uses design review as a tool for maintaining the City's special character areas, citywide appeal, and high quality of life. The purpose of design review is to protect the character of the City, and to ensure that new development, or changes to existing development, are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. Design review works to keep Roswell from looking and feeling like "Anywhere, USA."

Design issues include such things as open space and natural features, pedestrian and traffic circulation, building scale and massing, architectural history and details, landscaping, site lighting, utility connections and stormwater runoff. Each issue considered may appear individually small. However, in combination, they can make the difference between a bad project and a good project.

GARDEN HOUSES OF THE 1920S



DISTRICT MARKERS
DESIGN 25 TO 500 (ONE-TWO)



60 KING STREET ROSWELL, GA 30075 • (770) 594-8085 • (404) 459-6081 FAX

Figure 8.1
District Marker Design

In 1999, the Community Development Department began to address the issue of increasing the efficiency of the development review processes. Flow charts of the various development processes, including design review, were prepared, and reforms to the design review process were made and integrated into a comprehensive rewrite of the City's Zoning Ordinance, which includes the design review provisions.

URBAN DESIGN GOALS, POLICIES, AND OBJECTIVES

Urban Design Goals

Goal 1. Enhance the overall appearance of the City.

Goal 2. Strengthen the visual image and identity of Roswell as a historic city.

Goal 3. Provide for efficient and effective design review processes that implement the Comprehensive Plan.

Goal 4. Preserve and enhance the natural resources of Roswell.

Policies to be Implemented During Design Review

In addition to the purposes set forth in the City's Zoning Ordinance, the following policies are to be implemented during design review:

1. Promote well-designed developments that respect and utilize the best natural features of the land.
2. Set a standard of quality in the design of public projects for the private sector to follow.
3. Review proposed developments for compliance with urban design policies of the City and for consistency with applicable design guidelines.
4. Encourage well-planned and inviting streetscape designs and improvements as a part of all commercial redevelopment efforts.
5. Ensure through the design review process that commercial and office developments will be compatible with abutting residential neighborhoods.
6. Encourage the installation of indigenous, drought-tolerant plant species and the use of xeriscaping approaches in landscaping plans for developments.
7. Ensure the fulfillment of the Tree Protection Ordinance via the design review process.
8. Require new highway commercial developments, and new non-single family residential developments larger than three acres, to submit lighting plans and demonstrate compliance with lighting standards.

9. Integrate transportation planning in the urban design review process by: evaluating the extent to which new developments provide for safe and adequate pedestrian and (where appropriate) bicycle access; requiring interparcel connections to adjacent compatible developments; providing linkages to existing or planned greenways; and encouraging transit-friendly development principles.
10. In areas where appropriate, encourage commercial developers to provide outdoor seating and pedestrian plazas that contribute to a human-scale streetscape.
11. As a progressive, forward-thinking alternative to the traditional methods of stormwater management, encourage developers to design natural stormwater management systems, such as wet ponds, and integrate them as amenity features of the development.
12. Eliminate energy waste, where possible, without increasing costs, decreasing design qualities, or disrupting lifestyles.
13. Municipal road improvement plans should be reviewed by the Design Review Board or the Historic Preservation Commission (whichever has jurisdiction) for compatibility with urban design policies and adopted design guidelines.
14. When new traffic signals are installed by the state, City, or private developer, the City strongly encourages that decorative mast arms be used to support the traffic signal, as opposed to supporting the traffic signal by wire strung across the intersection.
15. Periodically analyze the design review process to ensure that it operates as efficiently as possible for applicants.

Objectives

1. Continue to apply for federal and state funding to enhance the streetscapes of road corridors in the City.
2. Implement a gateway master plan for major entrances to the City that incorporates various recommendations of adopted design guidelines.
3. Implementation of the SR 9 Streetscape Improvement Program should be complete by calendar year 2005.
4. Install landscaping in the median of State Route 120.
5. Recommendations for urban design and streetscape improvements, as described in various design guidelines, should be included in the City's Capital Improvement Plan for funding via the annual capital improvement budget.
6. Periodically revisit adopted design guidelines and amend them as necessary to be consistent with changing or anticipated future conditions. Generally, the various design guidelines should be evaluated for implementation success concurrent with review of the Comprehensive Plan.

7. Maintain provisions in the Zoning Ordinance that provide for innovative designs of mixed-use projects.